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METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF THE AXIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE OF ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN THE MEDIA SPACE OF UKRAINE

The article substantiates an integrated theoretical and methodological framework for studying the axiological discourse of Orthodox churches in Ukraine’s media space. The topic is relevant due to the simultaneous impact of two processes: the growing mediatization of religious communication, in which ecclesial meanings and evaluations circulate through digital platforms and journalistic formats, and the radical reconfiguration of value coordinates during the full-scale war, when public debates intertwine religious, civic, and political understandings of peace, justice, dignity, sacrifice, freedom, and “tradition”. The paper aims to demonstrate how combining Critical Discourse Analysis, hermeneutics, phenomenology of values, and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) makes it possible to: describe linguistic strategies of value legitimation; interpret theological and cultural meanings within their historical horizons; reconstruct believers’ experiences and intentionality; and map heterogeneous actor networks (human and non-human) that produce and amplify evaluations within media infrastructures. A research design is proposed that includes: building a corpus of texts (official statements, sermons, interviews, social media posts, and media publications), a multi-level coding scheme for value categories (value hierarchies, moral frames, narratives, rhetorical markers), and validation procedures (triangulation of data and methods, a reflexive research diary, and intercoder agreement checks). The novelty lies in a methodological synthesis that shifts the focus from analysing merely “what is said” to examining “how and by whom/what it is done” within networks of public communication. The practical relevance concerns the comparative study of discourses across different ecclesial jurisdictions and the expert assessment of how media shape trust or distrust in religious actors and their moral guidance.

Key words: axiological discourse, Orthodox churches, media space, Critical Discourse Analysis, hermeneutics, phenomenology, Actor-Network Theory.

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МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНІ ПІДХОДИ ДО АНАЛІЗУ АКСІОЛОГІЧНОГО ДИСКУРСУ ПРАВОСЛАВНИХ ЦЕРКОВ У МЕДІАПРОСТОРІ УКРАЇНИ

У статті обґрунтовано комплексну теоретико-методологічну рамку дослідження аксіологічного дискурсу православних церков в українському медіапросторі. Актуальність теми визначається одночасною дією двох процесів: інтенсивною медіатизацією релігійної комунікації, коли церковні смисли й оцінки поширюються через цифрові платформи та журналістські формати, і радикальним переозначенням ціннісних координат під

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час повномасштабної війни, коли в публічних дебатах перетинаються релігійні, громадянські та політичні уявлення про мир, справедливість, гідність, жертовність, свободу та «традицію». Метою є показати, як поєднання критичного дискурс-аналізу, герменевтики, феноменології цінностей і акторно-мережевої теорії (ANT) дозволяє одночасно: описати мовні стратегії легітимації цінностей; інтерпретувати богословські та культурні смисли у їх історичному горизонті; реконструювати переживання та інтенції суб'єктів віри; а також виявити мережеві конфігурації акторів (людських і нелюдських), що продукують і підсилюють певні оцінки в медіаінфраструктурі. Запропоновано дизайн дослідження, який включає формування корпусу текстів (офіційні заяви, проповіді, інтерв'ю, дописи в соціальних мережах, медіапублікації), багаторівневу схему кодування ціннісних категорій (ціннісні ієрархії, моральні фрейми, наративи, риторичні маркери) та процедури валідації (тріангуляція даних і методів, рефлексивний щоденник дослідника, перевірка узгодженості кодування). Наукова новизна полягає у методологічному синтезі, який переводить аналіз «що сказано» на рівень «як і ким/чим це робиться» в мережі публічної комунікації. Практичне значення – у можливості застосувати запропоновану рамку для порівняльного вивчення дискурсів різних церковних юрисдикцій, а також для експертної оцінки ролі медіа у формуванні довіри/недовіри до релігійних акторів і їхніх моральних настанов.

Ключові слова: аксіологічний дискурс, православні церкви, медіапростір, критичний дискурс-аналіз, герменевтика, феноменологія, акторно-мережева теорія.

Introduction. The modern Ukrainian media space is an environment in which religious institutions participate not only as "bearers of tradition" but also as active communicative actors, competing for the legitimacy of moral judgments and the right to call events "good" or "evil". This competition intensified after 2014 and reached a qualitatively new level in the context of full-scale war, when religious arguments entered the field of public mobilisation, political decisions, and media campaigns.

At the same time, the very form of church communication is transforming the influence of mediatization: from the "parochial" word to multi-channel distribution through official websites, broadcasts of church services, YouTube, Facebook, Telegram and other platforms. Researchers describe mediatization as a process in which media logics and technological infrastructures influence how religion becomes visible in the public sphere (Hjarvard, 2008; Balaklytsky, 2011). In the context of Ukraine, the mediatization dimension is further complicated by the conflictual nature of the church field and its political sensitivity (Zadoyanchuk, 2014).

In these circumstances, analysing the axiological discourse of Orthodox churches – that is, how churches articulate, hierarchize, and legitimise values in the media – becomes a methodologically challenging task. It requires working simultaneously with linguistic forms (vocabulary, rhetoric, frames), with meanings (theological and cultural horizons of interpretation), with the experiences and intentions of subjects of faith, and with media infrastructures that amplify some statements and marginalise others.

The article proposes a comprehensive methodological model for studying the axiological discourse of Orthodox churches in Ukraine's media space, combining critical discourse analysis (CDA), hermeneutics, the phenomenology of values, and actor-network theory. Such a synthesis allows us to avoid reducing church statements to either "pure politics" or "pure theology" and instead consider them as socio-symbolic actions embedded in networks of media communication.

Research Review and Theoretical Context. Methodological discussions on the analysis of religious media discourses unfold at the intersection of several traditions. On the one hand, studies of the mediatization of religion emphasise that the media act not only as a channel but also as an "agent of change" that transforms religious practices, forms of authority, and modes of public presence (Hjarvard, 2008; Campbell, 2013; Hoover, 2006). Ukrainian studies describe the media as a space where religious organisations construct images of themselves and interact with public opinion (Petrushkevych, 2019), as well as a field of interfaith tensions and conflicts over interpretation (Gotsur, 2020; Polumysna & Synchak, 2024).

On the other hand, critical approaches to discourse analysis emphasise that language does not simply reflect reality but participates in its construction–in particular, through the reproduction of power relations, ideologies, and social inequalities (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In Ukrainian media studies, it is important to understand discourse as a resource for identities and power relations in the public sphere (Kulyk, 2010).

A separate line is formed by interpretive traditions – hermeneutics and phenomenology. They allow us to work with religious texts as carriers

of meaning and experience, rather than only as instruments of influence. Hermeneutics emphasises the historicity of understanding and the need for a "fusion of horizons" between text and reader (Gadamer, 1989), as well as the productive tension between different ways of interpretation ("conflict of interpretations") and the need for a critical "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur, 1974). The phenomenology of values (Husserl, 1970; Scheler, 1973) provides a framework for analysing how values are experienced, ranked, and become "self-evident" to communities.

Finally, actor-network theory (ANT) proposes considering social phenomena as the effects of networks of interactions among heterogeneous actors, among which technologies, texts, institutional rules, and material objects play an important role (Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986). In the media space, this means that platform algorithms, journalistic standards, legal documents, or even visual "evidence" can act as full-fledged factors in the formation of public assessments (Gillespie, 2018; Bucher, 2018).

Conceptualisation of axiological discourse. The concept of "axiological discourse" in this article refers to the set of linguistic and media-communicative practices through which a community (in our case, church institutions and related actors) articulates values, establishes their hierarchy, and offers normative assessments of events, people, and actions. The axiological dimension of discourse is manifested primarily in the categories of evaluation: approval/condemnation, sacred/profane, just/unjust, "one's own"/"other's", "victim"/"culprit", etc.

For the operationalisation of values, it is helpful to distinguish between (a) "declared values" (those that are explicitly called good, virtue, or "tradition") and (b) "practically implicit values" – those that emerge from narratives, rhetorical strategies, and ways of defining actors. Here we draw on both the philosophical tradition of value hierarchy (Scheler, 1973) and social-psychological approaches that emphasise the structuredness and universality of certain value domains (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). In church discourse, these domains receive specific theological content – for example, "peace" can mean both the ethical ideal of reconciliation and the political position on ending war.

Since the media not only transmit but also "frame" events, it is important to combine value analysis with frame theory: a frame determines which aspects of reality become visible and how they relate to moral conclusions (Entman, 1993). In the media space, this is manifested in headline choices, quotes, visual images, and in how journalism incorporates church statements into broader narratives about war, national identity, or corruption.

Materials, corpus, and research design. Research into axiological discourse requires a transparent design that makes decisions regarding the data corpus and analysis procedures reproducible. Within the proposed framework, it is advisable to form the corpus according to the principle of a "media ecosystem", including: (1) official texts of churches (statements, appeals, resolutions, publications on websites); (2) public speeches of hierarchs (sermons, interviews, video addresses); (3) posts on social networks and messenger channels; (4) journalistic materials that quote or interpret church positions; (5) communicative "feedback" from the audience (comments, reposts, discussions), if this is ethically and methodologically justified.

The selection strategy can combine purposive sampling of "high visibility" texts–texts that have received broad media coverage and provoked public reaction–and theoretical sampling, when new texts are selected to test and refine analytical categories. This approach is particularly productive for comparing the discourses of different ecclesiastical jurisdictions in symmetrical situations (e.g., common holidays, crisis events, state decisions).

The proposed analytical procedure is multi-level. At the first level, a descriptive analysis of the corpus (genres, distribution channels, time waves) is carried out. At the second level, coding of value categories and discursive strategies is carried out. At the third, interpretation of meanings in a hermeneutic key and phenomenological reconstruction of intentions and experiences. At the fourth, network mapping of actors and mediators in the logic of ANT. Validation is ensured by triangulation of methods, comparison of independent codings (if possible) and reflexive control of the researcher's own biases.

Analytical matrix of axiological coding. To ensure the systematicity of the analysis, it is advisable to use an analytical coding matrix that combines linguistic indicators (vocabulary, metaphors, modalities), semantic units (values, frames),

narrative structures and network parameters (actors, mediators, channels). Such a matrix simultaneously serves as a tool for comparing jurisdictions and a means to make qualitative analysis more reproducible.

The matrix is based on the distinction between three levels of evaluation: (1) explicit evaluation (direct designations of "good/evil", "sin/virtue", "sacred/profane"); (2) implicit evaluation through frames and narratives (when a moral conclusion follows from a plot or comparison); (3) infrastructural evaluation (when media forms–a headline, a frame, a meme, an algorithmic reinforcement–set the affective tone and guide interpretation). To analyse the linguistic implementation of evaluations, one can draw on the theory of "appraisal language" in linguistics (Martin & White, 2005), combining it with CDA.

Table 1 provides a sample of such a matrix, which can be expanded depending on the research questions and the specifics of the corpus.

Critical Discourse Analysis: Values, Power, and Media Strategies. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) views language as a social practice that participates in the (re)production of power relations, ideologies, and social identities (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 2008). In a religious context, this means that the statements of church spokespeople not only "comment" on events, but also constitute an inevitable social reality: they shape the image of the Church in society, offer normative models of good and evil, and determine legitimate/illegitimate ways of acting.

In working with church texts, we rely on Fairclough's three-component model: text analysis (lexicon, grammar, rhetoric), discursive practice analysis (production/consumption of texts, genres, intertextuality), and social practice analysis (broader structures of power and conflict) (Fairclough, 1992). We also take into account van Dijk's social-cognitive approach, which emphasises the role of mental models, group representations, and ideological schemes in the production of discourse (van Dijk, 2008).

Operationally, CDA in our study involves the analysis of the following parameters: (1) vocabulary and evaluative markers (epithets, metaphors, euphemisms, markers of the sacred/profane); (2) rhetorical devices of legitimation (appeal to the authority of Scripture/Tradition, moral syllogisms, "rhetoric of peace" or "rhetoric of justice"); (3) narrative structures (e.g., "martyr church," "spiritual battle," "divided people/unity"); (4) categorization of actors (who are "us," who are "them," what attributes are attributed to "enemies"/"brothers"); (5) implications and presuppositions (what is presented as self-evident).

For example, in the address of the Primate of the UOC on the day of the start of the full-scale invasion, the image of "Cain's sin" as a symbol of fratricide is used (Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 2022). For CDA, it is important how the biblical precedent is transformed into an assessment framework: is the aggressor clearly identified, how is responsibility distributed, which modalities of the appeal ("to pray", "to maintain prudence", "to stop the bloodshed") are actualised, and which social expectations of the addressees are satisfied.

Critical analysis also takes into account the media embeddedness of church statements: quotes from sermons in news stories, headlines, video montages, and expert comments. This is where Ukrainian media studios come in handy, as they show how media discourse is connected to identities and power relations (Kulyk, 2010).

Hermeneutics: meanings, tradition and the "conflict of interpretations". The hermeneutic approach complements CDA by focusing on

Table 1

Example of an analytical matrix for coding axiological discourse

Level	Analytical unit	Indicators/questions	Method(s)
Text	Evaluation vocabulary	What words mean "sin", "virtue", "evil", "holiness"? What is the tonality?	CDA; Appraisal
Frame	Moral framework	What problem is highlighted? Who is the "victim/perpetrator"? What moral conclusion is being imposed?	Frame analysis; CDA
Narrative	Plot/story	What is the basic plot: martyrdom, defence, betrayal, reconciliation? What is the role of the Church?	CDA; hermeneutics
Experience	Experience	What affects and intentions are mobilised: fear, hope, anger, compassion, sacrifice?	Phenomenology
Chain	Actors and mediators	Who/what reinforces the statement (media, platforms, visual images)? What "translations" have taken place?	ANT; media research

the semantic dimension and conditions of understanding. While CDA often starts with the question "what does a text do in society?", hermeneutics asks "what does a text mean and how is it possible to understand it?" The classical hermeneutic principle of the circle indicates that the interpretation of a part requires an understanding of the whole (tradition, genre, context) and vice versa (Gadamer, 1989).

In religious discourse, this is especially important because church statements are saturated with biblical allusions, liturgical formulas, and historical images. For example, the call to "love one's enemies" in a situation of war can be perceived as an ethical requirement of the Gospel or as a political strategy of "peace at all costs". Hermeneutics suggests approaching this as a "conflict of interpretations" (Ricoeur, 1974): the same symbols and texts generate different meanings depending on the reader's horizon.

Methodologically, this means that we: (1) reconstruct the horizons of meaning of the church speaker (theological sources, previous statements, genre rules); (2) take into account the addressee and the situation of communication (internal church audience, general public, international media); (3) analyze intertextuality – how the text contains Scripture, canonical documents, "memory of tradition"; (4) compare alternative readings in the media and commentaries to identify "points of divergence" of interpretations.

Paul Ricoeur also proposes a "hermeneutics of suspicion", that is, a critical examination of the possible hidden motives and ideological functions of a text (Ricoeur, 1970). In our case, this allows us to ask: which themes are emphasised (peace, unity, humility) and which are silenced (the responsibility of the aggressor, justice, the right to defence)? Are we not sure that hermeneutic moves are a form of self-censorship or adaptation to external pressure?

Thus, hermeneutics brings a dimension of semantic depth to the study and helps to avoid the superficial reduction of church texts to political slogans.

Phenomenology and value theory: experiences, intentionality, hierarchies. The phenomenology of values adds to the analysis the question of how values are "given" in experience and how they are experienced as self-evident. The starting point is the idea of intentionality: consciousness is always directed towards something, and therefore, in religious communication, it is not only the words that are important, but also the images, experiences, and moral ideas to which they direct the listener (Husserl, 1970).

Max Scheler develops the concept of a hierarchy of values and shows that moral judgments often depend on the "ordo amoris" – the order of love/preferences that structures the inner world of the individual and the community (Scheler, 1973). In this sense, church discourse claims to articulate "higher" (sacred) values and can act as a source of moral certainty in times of crisis. At the same time, Scheler's critique of resentment raises the question of whether the effects of resentment, fear, or humiliation that can accumulate in conflict situations are masked by "morality" (Scheler, 1972).

Within the framework of our study, phenomenological analysis is applied to two dimensions. The first is the reconstruction of the experiences behind key axiological categories. For example, a call to "forgive" may be intended by the image of Christ and the experience of spiritual overcoming of hatred; however, for another addressee, it may be intended by the image of a specific crime and therefore perceived as unacceptable. The second is the analysis of how values are "embodied" in collective images: martyrdom, sacrifice, "confession", and dignity. Such images are not only rhetorical, but also existential structures of experience.

A phenomenological approach is also helpful in analysing how church jurisdictions shape moral narratives about war and sacrifice. In particular, the OCU publications repeatedly use the biblical formula about the greatest love as the willingness to "lay down one's soul for one's friends" (Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 2020). The researcher needs to describe the experiences and values that such an interpretation mobilises: love as sacrifice, community as a circle of "one's own" and death as a meaning-making act.

In general, phenomenology allows us to preserve the "human dimension" of values in our analysis and to see how moral categories function not only as arguments but also as experienced meanings.

Illustrative microanalysis: transition between methodological levels. Below is a short illustrative microanalysis that demonstrates how the proposed synthesis works on a single discursive

fragment. We do not aim to reconstruct the context in its entirety (this is the task of the empirical part of a separate study), but only to show the logic of the transition between levels of analysis.

Case 1: Address of the Primate of the UOC on the day of the start of a full-scale invasion, where the war is defined as "Cain's sin" of fratricide (Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 2022). At the CDA level, we fix the biblical metaphor as a key frame, analyse the modalities of the appeal, the categorisation of the parties to the conflict, and the presuppositions regarding the nature of "brotherhood". • At the hermeneutics level, we clarify how the biblical plot of Cain and Abel traditionally functions in Orthodox preaching, and what are the possible horizons of its actualisation in war (condemnation of aggression; call to repentance; warning against hatred). Phenomenological analysis asks what experiences are mobilised here: the horror of fratricide, the fear of the destruction of "unity", the desire for peace, and also a possible internal conflict between justice and mercy. The ANT level traces the network conditions of the emergence of the statement: public pressure on the church's position, media visibility of the statement, citations in the news, audience reactions, and the role of "texts of tradition" as actors that lend legitimacy to the statement.

Case 2: examples of the rhetoric of sacrifice in the discourse of the OCU, where the biblical formula about the highest love is actualised in relation to the defenders of the country (Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 2020). CDA allows us to see how the centre of evaluation shifts: from a general ethical principle to the specific moral legitimation of a military victim, which lexemes emphasise "their own", and how the collective subject is constructed. Hermeneutics clarifies how the New Testament text is interpreted in Ukrainian historical memory (Cossack myth, national sacrifice) and how it is "translated" into the modern political context. Phenomenology analyses the structure of experience: love as an action, death as meaning, community as a horizon of significance. ANT shows which mediators (military burials, memorials, photo/video of rituals) stabilise this discourse and make it convincing in the public sphere.

Both cases demonstrate that axiological discourse is not reducible to a "text" or a "position"; it is a process – with interpretations, affects, technologies, and struggles for visibility. That is why a comprehensive methodology is not an excess, but a condition for correct research.

Actor-Network Theory: Actor Networks and Media Infrastructures of Values. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) offers a non-standard but productive way to "ground" axiological analysis in the material-technological conditions of communication. Instead of explaining discourse solely in terms of the intentions of speakers or "structures of society". ANT suggests tracing how enduring meanings emerge from networks of interactions among heterogeneous actors (Latour, 2005). An actor/actant can be not only a person or an organisation, but also a media platform, a document, an algorithm, a visual image, or a technical format.

For the Ukrainian media space, this means that the axiological discourse of Orthodox churches should be considered as the result of the interaction of at least the following groups of actors: (1) church spokespeople and institutions; (2) audiences (believers, public activists, "social media audience"); (3) state institutions and legal regimes; (4) journalistic organizations and standards; (5) digital platforms and their algorithmic logics; (6) textual and symbolic resources of tradition (Scripture, canons, liturgy); (7) material and visual objects that become "evidence" in media debates.

A key mechanism in ANT is "translation" – the process by which actors engage other actors, form coalitions, and change the values of resources in ways that stabilise a particular order (Callon, 1986). In a media context, translation occurs, for example, when a church text is "recoded" into a journalistic headline, and the headline into a meme or viral video. In this process, values can be simplified, polarised, or acquire new connotations.

ANT also draws attention to algorithmic and platform intermediaries. Ranking algorithms, recommendation mechanics, moderation rules, and platform interfaces influence the visibility of church messages and which emotional-evaluative fragments go "viral" (Gillespie, 2018; Bucher, 2018). Therefore, the analysis of axiological discourse should be supplemented with a description of the digital environment: where the text is published, the format used (video/text/stream), the engagement metrics (views, reposts), and the commenting contexts.

In short, ANT allows us to see axiological discourse as a network effect: meanings do not simply

"exist" in words, but are stabilised (or destroyed) through the interaction of people, institutions, technologies, and symbolic resources.

Integrative model and analysis procedure. The proposed methodological synthesis can be imagined as working on four interconnected levels: (1) textual-discursive (CDA: language strategies, categorizations, rhetoric); (2) semantic-interpretative (hermeneutics: horizons of tradition, intertextuality, conflict of readings); (3) experiential-valued (phenomenology: intentions, experiences, hierarchies); (4) network-infrastructure (ANT: actors, mediators, translations, algorithms).

Triangulating these levels avoids methodological blind spots. CDA without hermeneutics risks reducing religious texts to ideological technologies and underestimating the internal logic of tradition. Hermeneutics without a critical dimension may fail to notice how the "language of tradition" is used to legitimise power or to silence responsibility. Phenomenology without a network perspective may overlook the technological conditions of the dissemination of meanings. ANT without text analysis may lose the specificity of linguistic strategies and value categories. Combining them provides a more complete picture.

For the practical implementation of the framework, the following sequence of steps is proposed: 1) description of the corpus and contexts (who, where, when, for whom speaks); 2) preliminary thematic coding (key topics and events); 3) axiological coding (values, their hierarchies, moral conclusions); 4) CDA -strategy analysis (vocabulary, narratives, categorizations, legitimation); 5) hermeneutic interpretation (intertextuality, horizons of meaning); 6) phenomenological reconstruction (experiences, intentionality); 7) ANT -network mapping (actor configurations, mediators, translations); 8) synthesis and comparison between jurisdictions/sites.

The reliability of the research is supported by a transparent description of procedures, preservation of an "audit trail" (corpus, codes, analytical memos), and reflexivity regarding the researcher's own positions, especially given the highly conflictual nature of the topic. The ethical dimension requires avoiding the stigmatisation of religious groups, handling personal data correctly on social media, and distinguishing between official church positions and private statements.

Limitations and ethical caveats. Any study of axiological discourse in wartime faces several limitations. First, the data corpus is potentially susceptible to "noise" and manipulation: fakes, out-of-context quotes, and video montages can replace original statements. This requires strict verification of sources and a distinction between the "original text" and its media adaptations.

Second, the researcher's position on such a topic is inevitably entangled with ethical and existential concerns. Reflective control (fixing one's own assumptions, separating description from evaluation, and transparency of coding criteria) becomes a necessary condition for scientific correctness.

Third, in the Ukrainian context, church discourses are not only confessional but also legal and political objects. Therefore, interpretations should avoid uncritically applying media labels to religious communities and take into account the difference between institutional documents, the positions of individual hierarchs, and the "grassroots" practices of believers.

Despite these limitations, the proposed methodology offers an opportunity to systematically investigate how values that claim universality but are always embedded in specific social and media conditions of existence are constructed in public communication.

Conclusions. A comprehensive analysis of the axiological discourse of Orthodox churches in Ukraine's media space requires a methodology that simultaneously accounts for language strategies, the semantic horizons of tradition, the experiential-value dimension, and the media infrastructure conditions of communication. The combination of critical discourse analysis, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and ANT allows us to consider church statements not as isolated texts but as socio-symbolic actions that function within a network of actors and mediators.

The proposed framework is open to further development: it can be complemented with quantitative tools (corpus linguistics, topic modelling, distribution network analysis), and applied to other confessional contexts. It can also be helpful for applied research – for example, to assess the risks of manipulation of the "language of values" in the media or to develop public communication strategies for churches seeking to maintain theological authenticity in digital publicity.

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